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ABSTRACT

Reading Recovery has proved to be an effective intervention for meeting the needs of at-risk first graders. When Reading Recovery is not fully implemented in a school, the teacher then assumes responsibility for intervention. This project addresses how a regular education, first grade classroom teacher can best meet the needs of first grade children with special literacy needs. Children enter first grade with diverse literacy needs. Those who are more economically disadvantaged often have a greater need than those who come from more enriched homes. However, it is not just an issue of economics; it is an issue of literacy deprivation. Research has revealed that there are common threads to appropriate interventions for at-risk readers. Although there is no one perfect method, strategies tend to include Reading Recovery techniques. Some important methods include good first whole class teaching of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle and meaning making strategies. Interventions for those at-risk include 30 minutes of one on one tutoring with each child. These intervention lessons should include leveled reading, guided reading, and direct, individualized, phonemic instruction. School wide staff development in specific teaching strategies and a consistent instructional approach in the classroom can be very beneficial to at-risk learners. (Contains 33 references and a chart of data.) (Author/RS)

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At-Risk in First Grade

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Acknowledgements

I am a baby boomer, a child of the fifties. Neither of my parents completed college, but I grew up knowing that I would. My parents regrets, nurtured my dreams for higher education. I went to college, met the man of my dreams and we married. In the seventies feminists screamed that I needed a career. I chose one, motherhood. Years later, I returned to college and became a teacher. I am a better teacher because of my own two children and the many lessons I have learned from them. I cannot imagine completing the requirements for this Master's without the support of my wonderful husband George and my children Jessica and Troy. They have all always seen me as more capable and more intelligent than I have ever seen myself. Like the first graders I teach, I find myself rising to their level of expectation. Their faith in me is astounding. Thank you George, Jessica and Troy for your love and support.

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Abstract

Reading Recovery has proved to be an effective intervention for meeting the needs of at-risk first graders. When Reading Recovery is not fully implemented in a school, the teacher then assumes responsibility for intervention. This project addresses how a regular education, first grade classroom teacher can best meet the needs of first grade children with special literacy needs.

Children enter first grade with diverse literacy needs. Those who are more economically disadvantaged often have greater need than those who come from more enriched homes. However, it is not just an issue of economics; it is an issue of literacy deprivation.

Research has revealed that there are common threads to appropriate interventions for at-risk readers. Although there is no one perfect method, strategies tend to include Reading Recovery techniques. Some important methods include good first whole class teaching of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle and meaning making strategies. Interventions for those at-risk include 30 minutes of one on one tutoring with each child. These intervention lessons should include leveled reading, guided writing, and direct, individualized, phonemic instruction. School wide staff development in specific teaching strategies and a consistent instructional approach in the classroom can be very beneficial to at-risk learners.

Introduction

"I can't read so good," Taylor mumbles as he heaves himself into a chair at the reading table. Taylor, a first grader, made this disclaimer when I called him for his initial reading assessment during the first week of school. All first grade teachers know Taylor. He is the little guy that is all but dragged into the classroom by his father. Taylor is the child who exhibits very poor self-esteem. Even his body language suggests defeat with shoulders that are often hunched over. He cries when frustrated by a literary task. Taylor seldom participates and has poor social and oral language skills. Taylor's self-assessment, with which I began this paper, was very accurate. His initial reading evaluation revealed that he had little phonemic awareness. He did not understand that sounds correspond to letters. It was clear that Taylor was a child with very low literacy skills; he was a child at-risk. My first grade, standards based, integrated literacy program will meet the needs of three fourths of the children in my class. But how do I best meet the needs of the one fourth of my class that are at-risk like Taylor? As recently as the 1999/2000 school year, my school site was fully implemented with Reading Recovery. Due to district designated staff movement, we are currently without any Reading Recovery services. The new reading teacher was informed that she would need to focus on third, fourth

and fifth grade students as well as first graders. Any intervention for my at-risk children would be my responsibility.

Statement of the Problem

What are the best interventions for insuring academic success for first grade students at-risk of failure in reading and writing? It seems amazing that a five or six year old child could already be at-risk of failure. However, reading readiness skills are important to a child's successful experience in first grade. A beginning first grader should already know the names of the upper case and lower case letters and their sounds and be able to use their letter knowledge to spell words using inventive spelling. They should have an understanding of concepts of print or how print can be used. First graders should be able to segment and synthesize short words. But most importantly, a beginning first grader must understand that words are made up of small sounds, that sounds make up words and that these words have meaning (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler, 1998). An early primary child's understanding of phonemic awareness determines their success or failure in learning to read (Adams, 1990).

It is not simply academic issues that impede success for at-risk first grade children. At-risk children also often lack the emotional health and social skills that are requisite to a successful school

experience. In addition, the families of at-risk first graders often are unable to help their children. The purpose of this project is to identify and explore strategies for improving the academic performance of at-risk first grade students.

Rationale

So, why devise an individualized plan to help Taylor and other at-risk children like him? It is a basic premise of a democratic society that free and equal educational opportunity should be provided to all children. John Dewey's philosophy was that all children should be educated in an equitable manner so that they could grow to become responsible citizens in a democratic society. This equity of education should not be only in terms of opportunity but in actual practice (Dewey, 1916). A democratic society can only benefit from the contributions of a well-educated and well-informed community (Tyler, 1996).

However, equity in our public schools is not just democratic idealism. It is the law. Any school that receives federal money must operate in a nondiscriminatory manner. The Office for Civil Rights, in the U.S. Department of Education, is the federal agency charged with implementing and insuring the compliance of federal acts, which attempt to insure equal access education to all American children (Baird, 1996). Specifically, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of

1973 (Office for Civil Rights, 1996) applies in the issue of individualized plans for at-risk first graders. In addition, it is the stated mission of the U.S. Department of Education to ensure equal access to education and promote educational excellence for all children in our nation.

The law notwithstanding, teachers like myself individualize special programs not because we have to but because we want to. President George W. Bush in his inaugural address (2001) stated, "America, at its best, is compassionate." President Bush emphasizes that the educationally disadvantaged must not be blamed for their disabilities. He continues, "And whatever our views of its cause, we can agree that children at-risk are not at fault." Both President Bush and I want Taylor and other children like him, to have the best educational opportunities available. I want Taylor to learn to read and to be proud of his success.

Background and Need

In 1996, President Clinton launched the America Reads Challenge (Walker, Scherry & Morrow,1999). The goal of this program is that all children will be able to read independently and well by the end of third grade. Those children, who do not meet this goal, in even a moderate manner, are in danger of dropping out of high school (Snow, Burns & Griffin). It is clear that children must be identified

early so interventions can be initiated. So who is at-risk? In the past children have been considered to be at-risk if they demonstrated a discrepancy between their ability and their achievement. They were considered to have a reading disability. Other children were considered to be at-risk if they fit into one or more categories such as low intelligence, lack of motivation or poor past instruction. A new model suggested by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998), suggests that those children at the lower tail of a bell-shaped distribution of reading ability, within a specific population, should be considered most at-risk of failure in reading.

Teachers in today's first grade classrooms are challenged to provide the most effective literacy instruction possible while faced with overwhelming diversity in terms of student readiness. The fact that many first graders arrive at first grade without the requisite readiness skills or belonging to what Smith called the "literacy club" most probably indicates they did not have extensive interaction with print in their earliest days (Smith, 1988). A joint position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) asserts that limited early literacy experiences before school entry could result in limited success in reading (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000). The lack of reading readiness and early literary experiences might be

traced to many different factors (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Risk factors for children are both child based and family based. Child based factors might include physical considerations such as: cognitive problems, hearing difficulties, language impairments or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). By the time a child enters school, predictors for failure would be; poor language development, lack of verbal memory, lack of phonological awareness and lack of reading readiness skills such as letter identification and concepts of print. Family based risk factors for early primary children would include; the home literary environment, verbal exchanges, languages other than English spoken in the home or non-standard dialects and, of course, the socio-economic status of the family.

Reading is a developmental process that begins at birth and continues as reading becomes automatic and purposeful (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). As outlined in the NAEYC and IRA position paper, in attempting to achieve the goal of developing fluent readers, there is not one method or program that will be the most effective in teaching all children to read. Rather, a multiplicity of methods must be employed to meet the individual needs of each potential reader. This position is summarized again in principal number one of the IRA's Children's Literacy Rights (2000); children have a right to appropriate early

reading instruction based on their individual needs. Diverse methods must be employed to teach diverse learners the skills necessary to learn to read. Those skills include the ability to be motivated to read, to decode, and to construct meaning from the text, to comprehend, to read fluently and to understand phonics. The Children's Literacy Rights continue by adding that children who struggle to learn to read should receive services from reading specialists.

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature examines the following; educational equity, reading theory and practice, interventions and reforms, pedagogical philosophy and parent involvement. The issue of educational equity is the democratic premise that all children are entitled to a free and equal education regardless of race, gender, religion or disability. Developmentally appropriate methods in the art of teaching reading are discussed in the review of reading theory and practice. The review of interventions and reforms explores specific programs such as Reading Recovery, Project Read, Guided Reading and Early Intervention in Reading that have proven successful with at-risk children. The importance of teacher training in multiple methodologies and the need for teachers to reflect and collaborate as they grow in their craft is discussed in the section on pedagogical philosophy. The final section of the literature review is parent

involvement. Multiple programs provide opportunities for the parents to become partners with the schools in family literacy.

Educational Equity

Tyler (1996) provides an overview of the history of education in our democratic system. He reminds the reader that it was Thomas Jefferson who first determined that an "educated citizenry" was necessary to protect a nation that was to be governed by its people. Jefferson like John Dewey believed that the purpose of education in a democracy was to educate responsible citizens. Through the years the premise that all men are created equal has been seriously questioned with respect to education in this country. Everyone in a democratic society deserves respect and an equal opportunity to learn. The society benefits from the individual talents of all of its members. Those children who do not learn due to inequities in the educational system do not contribute to society. We can prevent this from happening by providing special programs to meet the needs of children with special needs.

Reading Theory and Practice

One study by Juel and Minden-Cupp, (2000) compared language arts instruction in four first grade classrooms to determine how different methods of instruction influence student learning in reading. They conclude that children entering first grade with low reading

readiness skills will benefit most from a strong phonics program and firm behavioral expectations. The following four classroom practices were most successful: 1. There was explicit modeling of word recognition strategies. 2. Finger pointing was used while reading text. 3. Manipulative materials were used. 4. Reading groups were small with individualized programs.

Another study by Dahl and Scharer, (2000) documents the use of phonics in the whole language classroom. A study was conducted with 200 first graders in eight whole language classrooms. The researchers found that phonics instruction was embedded in the whole language curriculum. Phonics activities represented more than one third of the instructional activities that were observed. Forty-five percent of the phonics activities observed occurred in the writing component of the instruction. A comparison of pre and posttests in both encoding and decoding both in and out of context demonstrated statistically significant gains for all of the children in the study. Equal interval scaling determined that the children at the lowest end of the scale had gains equal to those children at the highest end of the scale. However children at the lowest end were still significantly below grade level at year's end. The authors conclude that whole language programs do indeed teach phonics skills.

Another article by Duffy and Hoffman, (1999), explores the concept of the "perfect method." Teachers are frequently required to use specific programs that have been designated "perfect." Such mandates do not allow for the teacher to act as thinking professionals. Duffy and Hoffman present evidence that it is the "eclectic" teacher, not a specific method or intervention, that will best meet the needs of every child. Such teachers chose their teaching methods based on the unique individualism of each potential reader. A method that is used one day under specific circumstances might not be appropriate on another day with the same student under different circumstances. Teachers must use their own classroom teaching knowledge and experience and construct their own "eclectic" approach to be effective reading teachers.

Calfee discusses his programs, Project Read and the Inquiring School, as a means to improve instruction in language arts for at-risk children (Calfee, 1991). The programs use a whole language approach, which emphasizes thematic instruction and authentic projects. In these programs phonics instruction is used but not emphasized. Students are taught specific communication and organizational skills that help them connect literate material with life experiences. The programs are based on the premise that all children are capable of profiting from higher-level instructional

models. Schools that have successfully implemented these programs are those schools that have strong school wide support and leadership.

A joint position statement of the IRA and the NAEYC on developmentally appropriate practices for young children (Neuman, et. al., 2000) provides a continuum of skills for pre-school through third grade and specific strategies that can be used in the classroom to implement those practices. Activities that support literate instruction are explained and illustrated with illustrations and photographs. Important to this paper are the sections on types of texts, phonological awareness, letters and words and assessment.

A video by Allyn and Bacon entitled Professionals in Action: Literacy (2000) provides an overview of good teaching practice in reading. The video is divided into five segments. Of particular importance to this paper are segments 1 through 3 and 5. Segment 1 addresses phonemic awareness. The viewer is assured that phonemic awareness can be taught. Phonemic awareness is defined as the understanding that every spoken word is composed of a sequence of small units of sound or phonemes. These sounds make up the words of our language. The use of Elkonin boxes as a teaching tool is explained. An understandable explanation of the difference between phonemic awareness and phonics is discussed.

Segment 2 addresses the teaching of phonics. Analytic phonics analyzes sounds within the context of the whole word. Synthetic phonics decodes words sound by sound. Phyllis Hunter defines phonics as the spoken word mapped to print. Teaching reading **is** rocket science according to Hunter. Understanding the reading process is complicated. Segment 3 emphasizes that the goal of reading is comprehension. Children construct meaning with the help of specific strategies. Strategic readers prepare to construct meaning with the use of a process such as the KWL technique. In this technique, the reader explores what she already KNOWS, what she WANTS to know and what she has LEARNED. Another strategy is learning to organize by summarizing and retelling the story. Questioning techniques help readers to make associations in their reading. Readers also learn to check their own comprehension by monitoring their speed and rereading to understand the text. Segment 5 addresses interventions. Interventions for at-risk learners have three parts. First, who will benefit must be determined and when the session will be held. Second, the skill building sessions must be implemented for at least 25 minutes a day. Third, the children must be assessed frequently with the use of running records. An intervention lesson would also have three parts. In the first part of the lesson, children read familiar books. In the second part of the

lesson, a new story is either introduced or the group participates in guided reading. In the third part of the lesson, the children use a variety of activities to explore print. The children are released from the intervention group when they are able to keep up with their grade level group. Appropriate methods for determining group membership are explored. Viewers of the video are taught how to group students for reading instruction. The fluidity of grouping is emphasized.

Interventions and Reform

The Reading Recovery Review (Askew, Fountas, Lyons, Pinnell & Schmitt, 1998) briefly describes the Reading Recovery program. The review also includes some responses to misunderstandings about the program, a summary of the data collected from 1985 to 1997 and a discussion of the challenges Reading Recovery continue to face.

Reading Recover (RR) is an intervention program based on Marie Clay's studies of young children in New Zealand learning to read and write in the 1960's. This research-based program is designed to help those first grade children who are low achieving despite good classroom instruction. Teacher leaders, who have been trained in specific instructional and assessment methods, train RR teachers over a one-year period. Each child selected for instruction works

with an RR teacher for 30 minutes each day outside the classroom. The length of the program is from 12 to 20 weeks. The child is discontinued from the program based on a collaborative decision made by a team including the classroom teacher. Discontinuing a child is possible when he or she is able to read and write at or above the average range for the classroom and will be able to continue to make reading progress at a satisfactory pace. A decision can be made to exit a child from the program if the child is not demonstrating appropriate progress.

Six of the most common misunderstandings about RR are clarified in this review.

1. RR does not need to be taught in conjunction with any specific reading approach.
2. RR teachers **do** teach letter identification and phonemic awareness.
3. RR is not intended as a classroom program. Teaching RR in small groups is not possible.
4. Compliance in RR mandates the selection of the lowest achieving students for the program.
5. Children are never just dropped from the program. They are discontinued or exited based on diagnostic instruction.
6. RR continues to grow and expand.

The review continues with a look at the data. Every RR teacher submits data on every RR student who participates in the program. Considerable data is presented that supports the effectiveness of RR. RR served 436,249 children from 1985 to 1997. Over 300,000 children completed the program. Of that group, 81% met the guidelines for being successfully discontinued. Respected scholars and researchers in the field of literacy add their comments in affirmation of RR. RR succeeds in teaching low achieving first graders how to read.

The final section of the review addresses specific challenges faced by RR. RR has been criticized as being too expensive. Data is presented that demonstrates RR to be a much less costly alternative than retention or long-term special education placement. RR does not raise the performance of peers in the classroom. RR is an individual program that will not necessarily raise the mean scores. However, fewer children will need remedial services. RR does not seek to change the structure of the school system. Rather it is a safety net within the school's literacy plan. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that RR does influence the practices of teachers within a RR school. Some critics suggest that the RR teacher training is too intense. Most RR teachers agree that the training is challenging but feel the collaborative and often consuming nature of

the training is necessary when learning to implement such a unique instructional model. A final criticism of RR is the question of why does RR choose to focus on "only fixing a few" instead of changing the system to allow the time for all children to learn to read at their individual developmental pace. This review presents a moving argument that "untangling the confusion" for even one child so he or she is able to catch up to more economically advantaged or environmentally enriched children is one step toward changing the system.

A booklet entitled L is for Literacy, L is for Love (Taher, 1997) describes six intervention programs for early primary children at-risk in literacy. All six successful programs, currently in place in six different Colorado schools, share common components. All the programs use early intervention not remediation to address children's individual needs. In all the programs, teachers and paraprofessionals are committed to a consistent instructional approach. Children designated as at-risk, work one on one with teachers or tutors for 30 minutes a day. All children read outside the classroom for 20 or more minutes a day with parents or other volunteers. Volunteers from the community are recruited and then trained to read with the children. Literacy Learning is one of the programs. Originating in New Zealand, the program is based on individual learning plans for

each child. Teachers work with coaches to improve their instructional and diagnostic skills. Family nights and a family resource center help parents to understand the how and whys of literacy instruction. Another intervention program by the Northeast Board of Cooperative Education Services addresses the needs of rural schools. The lowest 20% of the first grade population are assigned to tutors. Direct individual instruction is the primary strategy with an emphasis on auditory and visual discrimination problems. Success for All is the instructional program of choice for another school. In addition to 90-minute group reading sessions, individual tutoring is provided to the children most at-risk. The school also provides social services to meet the needs of the low-income families. A homegrown program, Reading Intervention Program, uses a small group approach for at-risk readers. Additional components are the Collaborative Literacy Intervention Project, for those most at-risk, and the Help One Student to Succeed, an adult mentor program. The Early Literacy Mediation (ELM) needed staff to provide the necessary 30 minutes of one to one reading time for their at-risk population. Their school board provided the funding to hire an instructional reading assistant for every first grade classroom. Both teachers and assistants are trained in ELM techniques. The final program described is the Cherry Creek School's Literacy Project. Their intervention model

implemented the use of three programs; Reading Recovery, Success in Primary Reading and Collaborative Literacy Intervention Project. An emphasis of this project was increased self-responsibility for the students. All six of the schools using the programs described above reported improved reading scores. Professional development of all staff and a school commitment to research based reading strategies appears to be key to each school's success.

The two programs Project Read and Guided Reading were used as a combined approach to teaching reading to eleven first grade children determined to be at-risk (Bruce, Snodgrass & Salzman, 1999). Guided Reading uses Reading Recovery techniques in small flexible groups based on instructional need. Leveled books are used for instruction. Project Read adopts a multi-sensory approach to making sound symbol connections. A comparison of autumn and spring stanines for the eleven students revealed statistically significant improvements in writing vocabulary, sentence dictation, word test and text levels.

In 1997, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) presented five principles to assist at-risk children achieve high standards.

1. Learning best takes place while teacher and students work collaboratively on practical projects.

2. Language development should always be a major goal in all contexts.
3. Instruction must be contextualized in the experience of the students.
4. Curriculum should challenge all children. At-risk children are capable of more than drill and kill activities and rote memorization.
5. Instructional conversations build a "community of learners."

The center invites further research so these principles can be better understood and have practical application in the classroom.

Developing Language Proficiency and Connecting School to Students Lives: Two Standards for Effective Teaching (1998), discusses two of the five CREDE pedagogy standards. The standards are: Developing language and literacy across the curriculum and Making meaning: Connecting school to student's lives. The CREDE standards include specific strategies for improving the academic success of at-risk learners. Frequent and real conversations between student and teacher contribute to oral literacy through modeling, restating, questioning and complimenting as is needed and appropriate. By connecting content instruction to children's lives through the use of speaking, listening, reading and writing activities,

learning becomes more meaningful to children. Specific examples apply these standards to teaching practice.

The Early Intervention in Reading (EIR) program (Frye, Shearer, Short &Taylor, 1995), is presented as an effective, supplemental program to be used by the regular classroom teacher to improve the reading of low-achieving readers in first grade. Programs such as Reading Recovery require highly trained teachers to work with children one on one for thirty minutes per day. The EIR program requires approximately twenty minutes a day and uses a small group approach. The EIR approach is much less expensive than individual tutoring programs. Initially designed to supplement a whole language program, the authors supply data that proves the programs effectiveness as a supplement to phonics based and basal programs as well. The program uses shortened retellings of picture books. Based on the number of words in the retelling, stories are used during specific times of the year. Retellings with 40 to 60 words are used in October and November and 60 to 90 word story summaries are used in December and January. A three-day lesson plan was used that included reading, discussion, phonics and writing. The schedule did necessitate an additional trained staff member to be present in the classroom for forty-five minutes a day. Data was

provided explaining the positive results in reading growth for children involved.

A study by Binkney and Dyer (1995) compares the effectiveness and costs of the three most commonly used interventions for children having difficulty learning to read. The programs discussed are: Retention, Chapter I and Special Education programs. Data is provided that demonstrates high costs and years of continued remediation for each of these programs. The authors offer Reading Recovery as an initially expensive program that proves much more cost effective and educationally effective in the long term. The four programs are compared by annual costs; average years in the program, total program time and total cost per student. Based on costs in 1991 dollars, special education was the most expensive at $9,906 per student. Reading Recovery cost the least at $2,063 per student. The authors conclude that school districts and school boards must become better informed about the costs and effectiveness of programs before implementing and funding specific intervention programs.

Collaboration as a process to meet the needs of diverse learners is the theme of a collection of articles edited by Risko and Bromley (2001). Section 1 of the book is entitled Ways to Think About Collaboration. Collaboration is presented as a means to provide

democratic education for all children and particularly those with special needs. The partnership of teachers, educational specialists and parents allows the sharing of expertise through a problem solving, dialogic, developmental and dynamic process. The use of this process effectively meets the diverse literary needs of all students. The authors emphasize that the process will not be successful without the willing participation and a clear understanding of expectations of all those involved. A collaborative problem-solving model provides a framework for shared responsibility. Section 1 concludes with a discussion of an application of the collaborative model to family literacy programs. Collaboration can be used as a tool to improve, expand and refine such programs. Multiple suggestions are offered for collaboration between social service groups, education communities and families.

Section 2 of the book is entitled Multiple Pathways to Collaboration. One article of particular interest concerns first grade collaboration. The author uses a classroom case study to present evidence that a system of shared inquiry can improve early literacy skills. The collaborative classroom is a community where cooperation is emphasized without the loss of individuality. The authors encourage the use of planned, collaborative literacy events. They

advise the teacher to, "let go of control" so that the children and teacher can support each other's learning.

Section 2 also includes a discussion of different models for building a literacy team on a school site. One successful approach is the Literacy Collaborative (LC). This program can only be implemented on school sites where Reading Recovery is already in place. Teachers must participate in a year long professional development led by a trained LC coordinator. The program emphasizes reading and writing instruction. There are four components to the reading instruction; reading aloud to children, shared reading, guided reading and reading workshop, and independent reading. There are also four components to the writing program; shared writing and language experience, interactive writing, guided writing and writing workshop and independent writing. The authors share standardized test results from a five year study conducted in Adams County, Ohio demonstrating the very successful results in teaching first and second graders to read using the LC program.

Other models for building a collaborative literacy team are also discussed in this section of the book. The team might include any number of professionals available on the school site. In addition to the classroom teacher, those professionals could include the reading

specialist, speech therapist, resource specialist and possibly paraprofessionals. All those involved in the team must be willing to work cooperatively, possibly co-teaching, to provide individualized education within the classroom setting. Through a process known as role release, all team members share their professional skills. Placing specialists, on a daily basis, in a regular classroom setting requires clear planning and organization and ongoing assessment.

An article by Kesner and Matthews (2000) explores the impact of collaborative, child directed literacy events on a child's concept of themselves as a reader. The article chronicles a school year in the life of Sammy, a first grade struggling reader with low social status among his peers in the classroom. Sammy is not aggressive or assertive during literacy events. His suggestions are most often ignored and he is repeatedly rejected during center activities. The authors suggest that these classroom experiences, that continuously silence Sammy's literary voice, will define Sammy's view of who he is as a reader. The authors offer six suggestions that will help both the teacher and students experience successful collaborative literary events.

Pedagogical Philosophy

Maxson (1996) presents a multiple case study on how teacher's belief systems influence their teaching of at-risk first graders. Some

general findings emerged. Teacher practice in the classroom is more influenced by a personal belief system than by theoretical research. A combination of teaching methods best meets the needs of at-risk children. At-risk children need a structured, stimulating, safe and nurturing environment in which to learn. The author concludes that teachers should be taught in teacher education programs the importance of using various methods and strategies in teaching at-risk children. Teachers need an opportunity to reflect on their personal belief system before educating at-risk children.

Dillion (2000) offers a guide for teacher reflection as they consider best strategies in teacher practice to help all children in their classrooms learn to read and write. Teachers are encouraged to keep a journal as they read the book. By thinking and writing about how they teach, teachers can begin the journey toward enlightened teaching. Guided reflection is provided that enables teachers to determine their personal philosophy of teaching. Teachers are asked to examine their personal literary experiences and how their values are reflected in their teaching. Teachers are also asked to read and reflect on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and Recommendations on Teaching Reading and Writing with the goal of meeting the literary needs of every child.

Community and Parent Involvement

An Arizona pilot project suggests that parental involvement is a key component to helping at-risk youth (Vandegrift & Greene, 1992). The authors rethought the idea of parental involvement and broke it down into two components, support and participation. Support was built by simply improving communication. Improved communication resulted in more parental involvement. Participation was encouraged with non-threatening opportunities. Real needs of the parents were met such as offering English as a Second Language classes, before higher levels of commitment were initiated.

Most parent literacy programs bring parents into the schools after hours. Another model brought the parents into the classroom for group literacy activities during the day. The Nistler, Maiers (2000) model was very successful in ameliorating the fears about the school site that are often a concern with the parents of at-risk youth. This program modeled appropriate literary practices for the parents as they worked with their children on literary activities. The outcome was successful in boosting the confidence of the parents. They learned that they could make a difference in helping their children learn to read.

The critical question, how do we best involve volunteers, with no formal training, in the classroom is addressed in this article by

Hoffman and Worthy (1999). A school in Florida implemented a Beyond Fundraising Program. Volunteers were taught "how to" teach reading in workshops. Monthly meetings were held. The program was effective in increasing parent enthusiasm and improving children's academic achievement. This program honored the concept of the parents as "first teachers." In another program, a teacher in Arizona juggles an eclectic mix of volunteers. Different volunteers perform different literary tasks based on their ability interests and time commitment. Each volunteer engages in the same activity each day they work in the classroom. Activities range from running literature circles or writer's workshops to simply taking children outside to read. Clear expectations and teacher flexibility contribute to the success of the program.

An article by Joseph Sanacore (1998) explores the importance of caring adult relationships with children in improving the academic success of children at-risk. Sanacore suggests that less parenting is taking place in our contemporary society and children are increasingly exposed to violence and poverty. Children respond to the stress of their daily lives with increased aggression, hostility, learning problems and depression. Sanacore discusses the work of both Maeroff (1998) and Comer (1997) as he discusses the potential

for at-risk children to improve academic success with the support of caring adults in a community of learners.

Four specific augmentation programs, emphasizing the importance of linking children's learning to the home and culture are described. The Literacy Corp Program is a successful example of a college/school/community partnership. College student tutors support youngster's academic and social and often emotional needs. The Parent Child Learning Project is designed specifically for Latino and African American families with children enrolled in the Head Start program. The program consists of 16 weekly workshops on parenting and literacy issues. Parents work collaboratively with staff to develop literacy programs for families. An Australian program, Talk to a Literacy Learner, designed to help parents better meet the literacy needs of their children is discussed. Sixteen workshop sessions over eight weeks help parents understand the process of beginning literacy. The author concludes with strategies for helping to meet the literacy needs of homeless children living in shelter based communities. The involvement of parents of homeless children is imperative to the children's academic success. Assisting these at-risk families is critical to the future success of their children. It is the author's belief that children at-risk cannot succeed by simply raising standards and increasing school accountability. Specific

programs must be employed to meet the academic, emotional and social needs of children at-risk.

The review of the literature has presented an overview of five components relevant to the topic of intervention for children at-risk in first grade. Educational equity insures the promise of an equal and appropriate education for all children, including those who are at-risk, regardless of ability. Specific strategies for good elementary teaching are discussed in Reading Theory and Practice. The most common thread among sound reading programs appears to be a strong phonics component. Reading Recovery is one program explored at some length in the Interventions and Reforms section of the review. Two components of Reading Recovery, individual learning plans and one on one tutoring, appear frequently throughout the other programs considered as well. Collaboration, both among colleges and in the classroom, as a means to literacy is also discussed. The review of Pedagogical Philosophy notes that teacher practice is more heavily influenced by our beliefs and values than by pedagogical research. Personal reflection is key to enlightened teaching. The final section on Community and Parent Involvement highlights the need for a community of caring and sharing adults to help children meet their literacy goals.

Methodology

Subjects

This study included a detailed observation of my first grade class. I teach at an elementary school in the North San Francisco Bay area. The school is Kindergarten through Fifth grade with a student population of about 430 students. We are a school of ethnic and cultural diversity. Approximately 40% of the school population is of color and about 25% qualify for free or reduced lunches. I teach a class of eighteen children who are diverse in ethnicity, background, culture, interest and ability. My twelve little boys and six little girls comprise what I would call a regular California style class. Forty-four percent of my class is of color. The class ethnicity mix includes four Hispanic children, one Filipino child, one African American child, one Saudi Arabian child, one Thai and Caucasian child and ten Caucasian children. By mid September 2000, I had targeted five of the children in my first grade class as being most at-risk of failing to learn to read. As this study followed American Psychological Association (1994) guidelines, the names of the students have been changed. The five children, Taylor, Ron, Jane, Ana and Carlos all had significantly below grade level skills for a beginning first grader. With the exception of Ron, all appeared fearful on the first day of school. Taylor was the lowest achieving child. He had an active IEP for

speech. Initially, Jane's good social and communication skills led me to believe she was more academically skilled. Testing revealed her low achievement level. Carlos had been previously retained in Kindergarten. Both he and Ana were designated as Limited English Speaking (LES). Although Ana had spent the previous year in developmentally appropriate Kindergarten where phonics was an emphasis, she had no phonemic awareness skills. I administered the Level 1 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) test to all five of the children in early September of 2000. None were able to achieve 90% accuracy. Our school reading specialist then assessed the five children. All were determined to be at a Reading Recovery level B.

Materials

The at-risk determination for the five aforementioned children, was based on three considerations; a multiple measure assessment sheet prepared by our district office based on spring testing, my classroom observation of the children during the first two weeks of the 2000/2001 school year and reading running records using the DRA. Data was collected in an ethnographic manner throughout the 2000/2001 school year. My observations were recorded in a notebook as the class performed literary tasks. When the children inquired what I was writing, I told them I was writing down all the wonderful things they were doing during reading and writing time. I

also continued to collect running records on all the children in my class at least once a month to determine growth in reading levels. Samples of the children's journal entries were collected monthly. I gave a reading survey to all of the children in my class. The survey was given individually to each child, while the other children were working independently. The questions were as follows:

1. Are you a reader?
2. Do you like to read?
3. What kinds of stories do you like to read?
4. Are you a good reader?
5. Who is a good reader in our class?
6. What can a good reader do?
7. Do other people read to you? Who?
8. Do you like to read? Why or why not?

Procedure

All eighteen of the children in my class, including the five determined to be at-risk, participated in my regular education, comprehensive, reading program that includes both a whole language and phonics approach. I use the district mandated reading and language arts program, Signatures by Harcourt Brace. Harcourt Brace is a shared reading program using thematic readers. The children receive direct instruction in specific reading strategies

including; building vocabulary, making predictions, K-W-L, sequencing and retelling and reading for understanding. Many different types of leveled books are used to teach guided reading including Rigby books, P.M. Readers and others. Children are placed in groups by ability level with four to six in each group. The groups are fluid and the members in each group change frequently. Guided reading groups meet three times a week for 20 to 25 minutes each session. In addition to phonics and spelling lessons in the language arts program, I also use the McCracken Phonics program from September through November. Phonemic Awareness is developed using various games and activities such as Make-A-Word. The children also learn to read by writing. We write on a daily basis in a variety of ways including both shared and individual writing. The children write in journals, four mornings a week using invented spelling. Writer's workshop is held once a week. The class goes to the school library once a week where the children check out one book each. The children participate in a classroom book bag literature program where they check out hardcover literature books as often as they return one. In January the children also begin to participate in a home reading program. Leveled books are sent home for individual practice.

All of the children, determined to be at-risk, received five weeks of small group instruction from the school reading specialist who was formerly a reading recovery teacher. These interventions sessions were held daily for 35 minutes at a time. The sessions included reading old favorites, reading new books, working with letters and writing. After the five weeks, the group returned to regular classroom reading groups. Beginning in September, three of the children, Ana, Taylor and Jane also received 25-minute individual tutoring sessions from our Century 2000 program. Carlos began the same program in January.

Specific intervention instructional strategies, previously discussed in the literature review, were added to the guided reading methods I have used in the past.

The Children's Case

The first child in my study is Ron. He is a bubbly, high energy and imaginative child. He is Caucasian. Since he was home schooled for Kindergarten, there was not a multiple measure assessment sheet for Ron. Early talks with his parents indicated that the father had had learning problems in school. I thought this family history might offer some insight into Ron's lack of reading readiness. The father was defensive and somewhat argumentative during initial parent/ teacher talks. Ron exhibited similar behaviors. Ron had initial difficulty adjusting to the structure of the school environment. At first, he was the class bad boy. Ron was a very reluctant worker. He had a repertoire of excuses why he was unable to complete any reading work. One day in late September as we began reading centers, he leaned back in his chair and said, "I'm not feeling like working right now. My back hurts and I think my arm hurts." He was prone to "loud" pouts with arms folded when he didn't get what he wanted. Also in September, he told the reading teacher, "It's just a very bad life. Mrs. Bradshaw wouldn't let me get a drink!" He had been told to get a drink before he left to go to the reading teacher. In spite of Ron's initial bad attitude, he began to zoom in reading. By October, the reading teacher and I decided her group was moving too slow for Ron. He returned to class for guided reading and was

placed in a more accelerated group. Ron jumped two to four reading levels each month. Ron was reading at a level 14 by the end of February. My expectation is that he will be reading at a level 20 or higher by June. He is no longer at-risk of not learning to read. He loves reading. His pouts are now confined to those times I am unable to meet with his reading group. He encourages others on their way to reading table to be tested by saying, "May the force be with you!" I believe Ron was a victim of poor previous teaching. He was definitely a false positive in my at-risk group.

The second child in my study was Taylor. Taylor, mentioned in my introduction, is the lowest achieving child in the group. He initially exhibited severe and crippling anxiety about reading and writing. His mother is Thai and his father is white. His parents share custody, although he seldom sees the mother. Taylor's father told me that he had also had severe learning problems as a child that went undiagnosed for years. Taylor was already receiving speech services in Kindergarten. I was assured early in the year, that his speech placement might be the "back door" into the resource program. I referred Taylor for a Study Team evaluation in September. He was referred for testing and his IEP was held on November 15. Testing revealed significant auditory processing problems and average intelligence with strong problem solving

abilities. Visual and auditory memory skills were far below normal for his age. He now receives 30 minutes a day in resource time to help him with basic pre-reading skills. These skills were far below grade level. It was clear that Taylor was reading-disabled. Taylor scored 1 on the Reading Recovery score sheet. He was able to write two words from dictation and was able to identify only 20 of 54 letters. Taylor also received speech services twice a week for 30 minutes. Some days, Taylor was receiving up to two hours of services provided by specialists. He continued to participate in regular class literacy activities as much as possible. My primary goal for Taylor was for him to learn to read. However that was not going to happen if we were not able to improve his attitude about school. Because Taylor was so anxious about journal writing, his dad agreed to work with Taylor each morning before school. Dad and Taylor would think of a simple sentence and practice the sentence at home. Then Taylor would write what he remembered at journal time. Because journal time was always about 40 minutes after school started, Taylor stopped dreading journal time and started looking forward to it. At first Taylor needed a great deal of my time. We have gradually weaned him from his dependence on both dad and me. Progress was slow but he was able to write a very simple sentence independently by early November. By February he was

attempting to write two sentences. Reading continued to be a struggle for Taylor all year. He was not able to keep up with the group of children who were seeing the reading teacher. He left the group in mid October. In spite of Taylor's lack of academic success, his attitude about school continued to improve. In mid October I overheard him tell his seat partners, " I like school." His much improved, relaxed attitude was reflected in another comment he made when we were talking about the writing assessment that would not take place until February. I told the children we would work hard to get ready for the test but it was still a long way off. Taylor said, "So don't even worry about it!" Throughout the year, with the help of the school psychologist, I tried to help modify Taylor's response to school stress. By November, he had stopped shaking and hyperventilating for the most part. That month, he volunteered to be a duck as we did a Reader's Theater for the story Five Little Ducks. He even showed the other children how to look more like a duck by making a V with their arms. Reading continues to be a slow process with Taylor. Just when I'm about to throw up my arms in defeat, he will say or do something that gives me hope he will learn to read. His ability to focus has improved. He participates willingly in all literary activities. His strength appears to be in his ability to make predictions about literature and to draw conclusions. By December,

Taylor was an active participate in his small reading group. Phonemic awareness continues to be a weak area. By the end of February, he was able to pass a level 2 in the DAR assessment. He was not able to pass the district writing assessment in February, however a writing activity, completed in late February did demonstrate progress. The phrase, "If I had a robot . . ." was printed on the board for the children to copy. He told me he knew that the ". . ." meant "something is coming after that." Taylor continued his story as follows:

" I will mac (all c's reversed) Hm mac mi dad wib mi DaD."

The translation is, " I will make him make my bed with my dad." A continuing personality conflict with his Century 2000 tutor led me to discontinue their work together. Taylor's last running record in mid March placed him at a DRA level 3. We were both very excited that he had passed this level. I told him that the next time I tested him, I was sure he would pass the level 4. He said, "Let's try right now!" Taylor still can't read, but his attitude about reading has changed dramatically.

The third child in the study is Jane. Jane is a sweet and affectionate little girl. She is very blonde and slight and uses a baby voice and face gestures when she is unable to read or write independently. Even though Jane cried every morning for the first

three weeks of school, chats with mom indicated that the mother was not concerned about her daughter's reluctance to come to school or her reading difficulties. By October, the mother wanted her child returned to Kindergarten because first grade was, "too difficult." Jane's mom felt that my expectations, based on the California State Standards, were too high for Jane. Returning Jane to Kindergarten was not an option as there were no openings. Jane was given the option of transferring to a neighboring school. Jane's difficulties in reading must have come as a big surprise to her mother. An older brother and sister were both strong readers. Jane had demonstrated a strong performance in literacy on her Kindergarten Spring profile. Her writing however was below grade level. Her Kindergarten teacher had recommended her for summer school. She did not attend as the family was busy with vacation plans. It became clear very quickly that Jane gave the false impression of knowing more than she truly did. Also, there was always a certain tentativeness in all her literary work that suggested deep insecurity about her performance. The real give away was her lack of one to one correspondence. Jane's mom decided to become a Century 2000 tutor at our school. She thought it might enable her to help Jane at home. However, Jane did not want her mother's help. There was a real power struggle going on at home. Jane has made slow and

steady progress in reading throughout the year. She was still struggling with identifying simple rhyming words like see and me auditorially in January. However she was able to spell the words easily. I suspect that Jane has an auditory discrimination problem. She began the year at a level B in reading. She had passed the DAR level 8 and was reading in a level 9 by the end of February. Jane's final DRA assessment in mid-March placed her at a strong level 10. That positioned her just slightly below grade level based on our district standards. Jane's writing progress has been better than her reading progress. Her district writing assessment placed her at grade level at the beginning of February. The real growth for Jane however has been in her self-confidence. Jane's seat partner was having difficulty with a balance activity during science. Jane told her, "You just have to believe in yourself!" She then showed her partner how to complete the activity. Sadly Jane is moving to Atlanta, Georgia at the end of March. The mother is considering retention in first grade next year depending on the standards in her new school.

The fourth child is Ana. Ana, the youngest of the group, is vivacious and always smiling. She is Hispanic and is designated as Limited English Speaking (LES). Although Ana attended Kindergarten at our school last year and received strong phonemic awareness instruction she had few phonics skills when she entered first grade.

Ana memorizes sight words but cannot segment words. She does not hear the position of letter sounds in the words. When she cannot complete a literary task, she tries to find a cleaning or straightening job to do. A primary goal for Ana was to improve her oral language skills. Ana communicated with gestures and simple phrases. I used sheltered English techniques to improve her understanding of classroom instruction. The first understandable sentence Ana wrote during journal time was in late October. She wrote:

"I see Mand at Medas."

Translation: "I see Miranda at MacDonald's."

Just two weeks later, Ana's writing was significantly better. She was beginning to reference, with help, to the word wall for spelling words that were difficult for her. She wrote:

"I play with my sdr an the park."

Translation: I play with my sister in the park. The words sister and park were not on the word wall. Ana's small group worked daily on segmenting and synthesizing reading vocabulary words using chest pounding for each phoneme. She was demonstrating excellent growth in oral language skills by mid November when we had the following conversation. Ana—"My tooth it moves." Me—"Your tooth is loose?" Ana nods. I model the correct sentence. She says it after me. Ana—"My tooth is loose." She puts her finger in her mouth and moves the tooth. Me—"Ana, what is the word we use when a tooth

moves back and forth?" Ana—"Wiggle." Me—"Can you use that word in a sentence?" Ana—"My tooth wiggle." We began to use Elkonin boxes in Ana's guided reading group in late November. This strategy seemed to be working quite well for her. She was able to pass a DRA level 4 in mid December. She moved away two days later.

Finally, Carlos, also Hispanic, is the last member of our little group. Carlos has made great gains in English in the last two years. He is also designated as LES. He was placed in a Kindergarten/First grade as a first grader at our school last year. When it became clear he was not ready for first grade, he was redesignated as a Kindergartener in the same class. He is a quiet, independent worker. In fact, he is so quiet he could easily "fall through the cracks" in any classroom. Carlos loves books and it was clear from the first day of class that he was determined to read. So great was his motivation that I didn't see him as at-risk as quickly as I did the other children. Carlos' English language skills were much better than Ana's. After speaking with his mother, who had limited English language skills, I determined that Carlos came from a literacy deprived home. There were few books in the home in any language and Mom could only read very simple text in English. However, the parents did want their son to do well in school. Both mom and dad spoke to me of their concerns that Carlos not be retained again. However, they did not

help Carlos at home. Only math homework was returned, never any language homework. This pattern continued through out the year in spite of talks with the parents and Carlos and modifications to the homework. The parents respectfully felt it was my job to teach their son. So we worked in class. Carlos made slow and steady progress throughout the year. I realize I have little evidence of an oral nature because Carlos seldom spoke in class. He participated orally when asked questions but he never volunteered. By mid February all that began to change for Carlos. He began to volunteer to participate in his small, guided reading group much more frequently. I think Carlos had a literary awakening! He started calling out to me during journal time, asking for help spelling words not on the word wall. I was thrilled the first time I had to admonish him to let someone else talk during a small group reading lesson. I knew he had turned a corner when another child in his group was having difficulty with the word "flower." Carlos told him the "ow" sound was, ". . . /ow/ like in the word cow." Carlos passed the DRA level 10 in mid March. I believe he will achieve grade level performance by June.

Analysis and Discussion

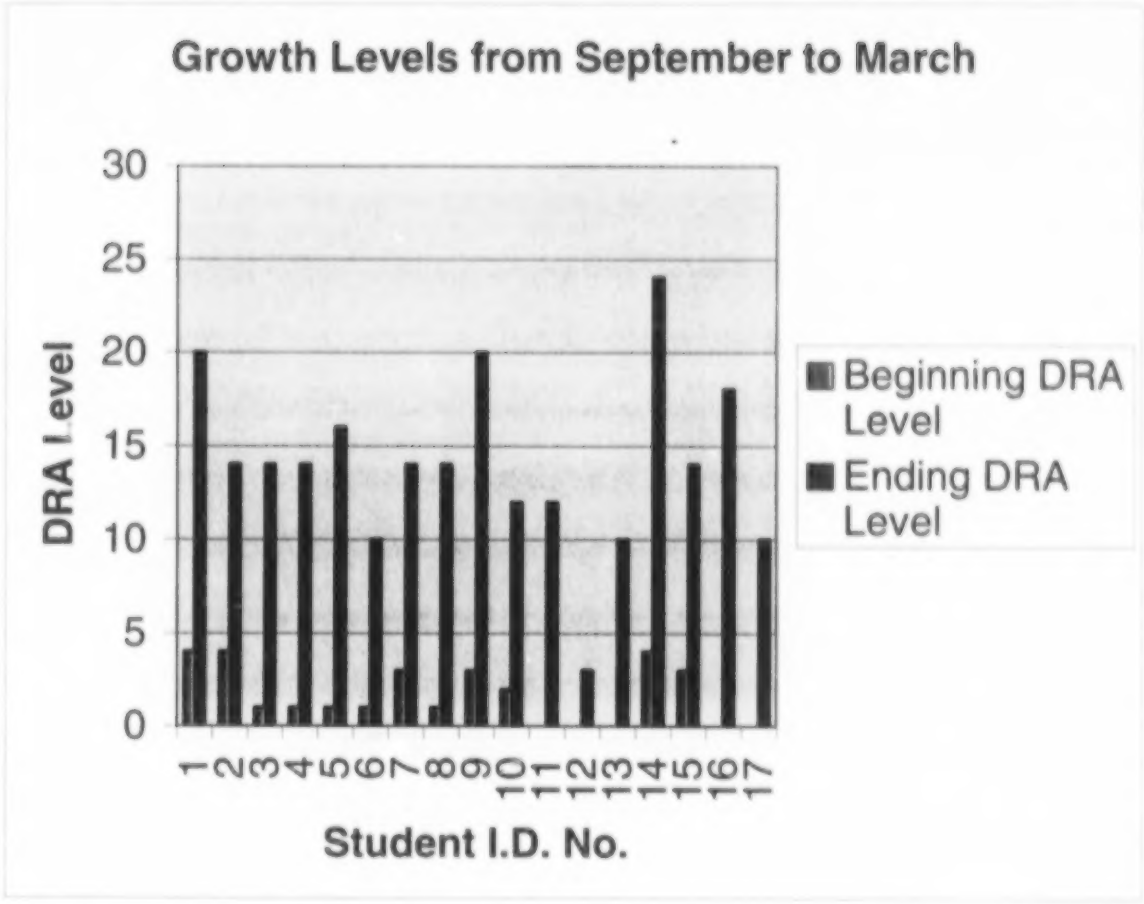
Reading Survey

The reading survey was administered to my class of 17 children in early February of 2001. Ana had moved in December. The results were as follows. Of the 17 children, 16 responded affirmatively that they were readers. I included as affirmative any of the following responses: yes, yeah, uh huh, um hum or an up and down nod of the head. Taylor responded with a less than enthusiastic, "Kind of." There were no negative responses. All 17 of the children responded affirmatively that they liked to read. Taylor was one of only two children who had no response when asked what kinds of stories they like to read. Thirteen of the children named specific stories or books. Almost all of the stories mentioned had been read during shared reading sessions in class or sent home with them as home readers. Jane liked Barbie chapter books and one little boy told me he liked animal stories. The top reader in the class told me he liked Bob books and dinosaur stories. All seventeen of the children thought they were good readers. When asked to name other good readers in the class, the children gave me an assortment of names ranging from the number 3 reader in the class down to number 15. Not one child named the two highest readers in the class. Most often they named a child who was in their own reading group. There were five votes

for a little girl who is currently struggling to remain in the middle group. When asked to describe what good readers do, only Taylor responded, "I don't really know." The other children were very sure of their responses. The most common response was that good readers "sound out words." Carlos felt that good readers could read lots of books, while Jane thought good readers would be able to read, "whole books." This sentiment was expressed by many of the children. The top readers in the class thought that good readers could, "read really well," and "choose their own books," and "concentrate." Every child in the class told me that someone else reads to them. Sixteen of the children named family members living at home. Only Carlos named other children in the class. When I asked him if anyone at home read to him, he said mom did. All seventeen children said they liked to read. Taylor, Jane and Carlos told me they liked to read so they could "learn." Ron told me he liked to read, "Cuz it's one of my talents!" Two children, reading at DAR levels 9 and 10 said they liked reading so they could move on to the next grade. Most of those children reading at a DAR level 12 or higher told me they liked to read because, "It's fun!"

My primary purpose for this survey was to explore the attitude of the children regarding reading. I was surprised to learn that every child in the class perceived themselves as a reader. Not only did

they all see themselves as readers but they all had quite spirited attitudes about reading as well. I was initially concerned that they seemed unaware of who the "good" readers were in the class. This data caused me to stop and reflect on the strategies I was using to teach reading. I think the children identified less than fluent classmates as "good" readers because I do not use Round Robin reading during reading instruction. However, we do shared reading and partner reading in our small, guided reading groups. Most of children choose someone from their small group as a good reader. The children's belief that they are all good readers speaks to their confidence rather than their ability. I realize I emphasize reading success in my class. I am constantly vigilant for any small reading triumph to tell the children, "You're a reader!" I will not allow children to make negative comments about themselves or others. So, by acting as a reading cheerleader, have I given the children an unrealistic view of their literary success? Maybe. However, I think the children in my class are developing the attitude of a reader. Reading is like learning to ride a bike. If you think you can then you are willing to take the risk of trying. The children in my class think they can read. Given the appropriate support they will read.



The at-risk students were I.D. numbers 12, 13, 16 and 17.

Ana left the class in December 2000.

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Conclusion

The best intervention for at-risk first graders is excellent first teaching. Direct instruction of reading skills in phonemic awareness, phonics and making meaning is imperative. Reading skills can be built during whole class sessions but are most effective within a small homogeneously selected group or better yet with a one on one approach. Good reading instruction occurs in both whole language and phonics emphasis classrooms. The key to a successful program is balance and consistency.

There is not one "perfect" instructional method that will meet the needs of every at-risk first grader. The children in my case studies were at-risk for many different reasons. Ron was at-risk due to poor first teaching. Ana and Carlos were at-risk for numerous reasons, which included poor home literacy environment, low socioeconomic status and second language development. Ana's difficulties also included a total lack of phonemic awareness. Taylor had severe reading disabilities. Jane's primary reading problems were issues of confidence and motivation. Only Ron's reading difficulties were resolved with good primary instruction. The other children all required individualized programs to meet their special needs. The instructional approach to be used with each at-risk learner should be

determined after careful assessment, both formal and informal. Then, insightful, reflective and knowledgeable teachers should design lessons to meet individual needs. Classroom teachers need to know when to seek help from other educational experts and how to work collaboratively to insure student success.

The final component in meeting the reading needs of at-risk first graders is to involve not just the parents but also the community in children's education. Sadly, too many parents are unable or unwilling to help with their child's education. Therefore, volunteers and school staff must provide a caring community of support for our children in need. Volunteers and parents should be recruited from the community and trained to become literacy tutors. Community literacy programs should be designed or selected to meet the needs of the community. Parents should be involved at the school site when ever and where ever and in whatever capacity they are comfortable. Parental involvement or interest is critical to the child's success in reading. I have recently discovered that a Filipino child in my class, Jim, was not just struggling with second language difficulties and severe speech articulation problems, he has also been diagnosed with reading disabilities that equal Taylor's. Jim was reading at a DRA level 12 in mid March. Taylor was reading at a DRA

level 3. The only discernable difference between the two boys is the strong family support enjoyed by Jim but not by Taylor.

In a perfect world, every at-risk first grade child would receive good classroom instruction, individualized intervention and the support of a caring community. What a wonderful world it would be if no child were ever at-risk in second grade!

Implications

One of the purposes of this paper was to formulate a plan to meet the needs of the first graders at-risk in learning to read in a regular education classroom. The state of California has both raised grade level standards and implemented a new promotion policy that mandates retention if the standards are not met. Politicians and business leaders seem to think that by simply raising the standards, educational outcomes will also improve. Those of us in the frontlines of this educational battle know that a strong intervention strategy as opposed to a remediation approach is the only hope for an improved academic performance in our at-risk population. I have developed an intervention approach I feel would improve the academic outcome for the at-risk first graders at my school.

The best intervention for the first graders at-risk in my school district would be the full implementation of Reading Recovery. Sadly that has not been the case at my school this year. My plan is a fiscally prudent, positive model for intervention designed for at-risk beginning first graders who have not yet failed at learning to read. The first, most critical step, in this process would be the formation of the intervention class. With the assistance of the Kindergarten team and the site principal, fourteen Kindergarten children, determined to be at-risk in learning to read, would be selected to participate in this

program. The goal would be to assemble a group that was homogeneous in reading but more heterogeneous in other skills and interests. A team of education specialists would be assembled. Those specialists would include the reading teacher, the resource specialist, the classroom teachers, the speech therapist and the school psychologist. These specialists would work and plan collaboratively to meet the needs of the children in the class. A reading center approach would be used for 1½ hours a day, five days a week. The children would be placed in groups, according to needs, and rotate through three different reading centers each day. Three mornings a week the reading teacher, the resource specialist and the classroom teacher would work together in the classroom to run the reading centers. Each of the three specialists would "man" a center. The lessons would be 25 minutes in length (five minutes for movement) and would be planned to meet the needs of the group. One center would be guided reading, a second center would be guided writing and a third center would be phonemic awareness. On one of the two remaining mornings, the speech therapist would take the place of the resource specialist. The teacher, a para-professional and a classroom helper, would manage the remaining morning. The classroom helper slot would be open to the school psychologist, the site principal or a classroom parent. The collaboration of the

specialists in this manner would provide a community of caring adults for the at-risk learners as well as intense and focused literacy instruction.

The children in the classroom would participate fully in the district first grade curriculum in language arts, math, science and the arts. Lessons would be modified to meet the group needs. Instruction throughout the day would be carefully planned and implemented. Paraprofessionals and volunteers would provide one on one tutoring, in the Success Controlled Optimal Reading Experience (Cradler & Bechthold, 1973) and individual reading. Since the specialists would be working in the classroom, there would be few "pull outs." Fewer instructional minutes would be lost due to children running, drifting, wandering and sometimes even walking back and forth to work with their "other" teachers. In an attempt to meet the district and state standards, teachers are forced to "teach to the top" and "remediate the bottom." This plan would allow me to teach to the needs of the children. Fluidity could also be built into this program. If children progressed beyond the skill level of the class, a collaborative decision could be made to move the child to a more accelerated group in another class.

An additional important component to this program would be parent and community involvement and education. An initial parent

information night would be held to explain the program to the parents. Training, based on Training the Reading Team (Walker, Scherry and Morrow, 1999) would be available for any parent or community volunteer who would like to help in the classroom. Family nights would be held once every six weeks. Family nights would be multi purpose. First these meetings would begin to build a community among the families. This could be accomplished by allowing the children to come and play while the parents talk and learn. Cookies could be served. Possibly the school library could be opened for family reading and book check out. Second, these meetings would involve the families in their child's literacy. The curriculum could be explained in smaller segments and questions could be answered about how best to help.

If our goal is to have every child use reading as a tool to learn, then we must first teach children to read. However, teachers are not always free to choose the most creative or appropriate method to work with children. The STANDARDS are of paramount importance, not the needs of the children. Real teaching should allow creativity of expression, not robotic compliance. This collaborative, intervention strategy will help those most at-risk in first grade achieve that goal.

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